

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

READINESS CENTERS



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
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INTRODUCTION

The Executive Office of Education (EOE) is pleased to present this Request for Responses (RFR) to public and private institutions of higher education, educational collaboratives, educational service providers, business and community partners, and other stakeholders to establish regional Readiness Centers in Massachusetts.

Background

In June 2008, Governor Patrick released his blueprint for education reform in Massachusetts, the Education Action Agenda, and called on stakeholders across the Commonwealth to think creatively and innovatively about improving our current education system. In particular, he asserted that we must create a fully integrated, coherent, and seamless education system that will promote high levels of achievement for all students and support our educators throughout their careers.

In order to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and better ensure that all educators are prepared to provide high-quality instruction to our diverse population of students, we must reshape and align existing systems of educator recruitment, preparation, certification, licensure, and ongoing professional development. To that end, the Education Action Agenda included a proposal to establish regional Readiness Centers, multipurpose and collaborative hubs for providing professional development and other instructional services to educators and also targeted assistance to improve districts and schools.

DESCRIPTION OF THE READINESS CENTERS

The Readiness Centers will focus on improving the quality of teaching from birth through higher education and across the Commonwealth, and will offer services and activities that will address local and regional educational needs as well as statewide priorities. The Readiness Centers will also serve as hubs for collaboration among local, regional, and state stakeholders including institutions of higher education, educational collaboratives, educational service providers, business and community partners, state agencies, and other stakeholders. The development of partnerships among these stakeholders will result in the delivery of more targeted, aligned, and coherent services to early education and out-of-school time programs, schools, districts, and communities.

The goals of the Readiness Centers are as follows: 1) improve the quality of teaching across the education continuum by increasing the content knowledge of educators and supporting the development and implementation of effective instructional practices; 2) improve the quality of professional development and learning opportunities for educators; 3) maximize existing resources and deliver professional development and instructional services more effectively and efficiently; and 4) drive policy improvements based on the innovative instructional practices that are developed.

The EOE proposes the establishment of six Readiness Centers in the following regions of the state: Berkshire County, Pioneer Valley, Central, Northeast, Greater Boston, and Southeast/Cape and Islands. Within each region, multiple sites can be established to provide all educators and stakeholders with access to differentiated services as needed.

Guiding Principles of the Readiness Centers

- The Readiness Centers will support the development of more aligned and comprehensive models for teacher induction, professional development, and mentoring for educators across the education continuum from birth through higher education.
- The Readiness Centers will provide focused opportunities for stronger and more consistent collaboration among early education and out-of-school time programs, schools, districts, educational collaboratives, educational service providers, institutions of higher education, state agencies, and other stakeholders.
- The Readiness Centers will leverage and strategically allocate existing institutional and organizational resources to address the needs of early education and out-of-school time programs, schools, and districts more effectively and efficiently.
- The Readiness Centers will help to create a stronger network for disseminating information about best practices, replicable instructional models, and bringing successful instructional practices to scale.

- The Readiness Centers will align local and regional services with rigorous performance evaluation measures and methods.
- The Readiness Centers will build the capacity of local, regional, and state stakeholders to effectively support all educators across the Commonwealth.

Primary Functions

All Readiness Centers will execute several primary functions.

- Support the identification and development of best practices and replicable instructional models that can be utilized throughout the state, especially with regard to several statewide priorities:
 - Addressing achievement gaps among different groups of students;
 - Improving the quality of instruction in literacy, particularly early literacy;
 - Improving the quality of instruction for English Language Learners;
 - Improving the quality of instruction for students who receive special education services;
 - Improving the quality of instruction in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses;
 - Using data more effectively to assess student progress and performance and also inform instruction;
 - Improving the alignment of instruction across the educational continuum from birth through higher education; and
 - Improving the quality of instruction through the efficient delivery of services to smaller and under-resourced districts and communities.
- Collaborate with local, regional, and state partners to coordinate the delivery of professional development and instructional services that are already being provided and determine how to provide services that may not currently be available by:
 - Conducting an inventory of all service providers and professional development resources in the region;
 - Conducting needs assessments at the local and regional levels to identify gaps and determine which additional services should be provided; and
 - Coordinating statewide “training of trainers” initiatives to embed needed expertise at the local and regional levels.
- Collaborate with other Readiness Centers and state partners to identify statewide trends and coordinate the distribution of professional development and instructional services and other resources.
- With guidance and support from the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), develop and manage the regional pathway into and through post-secondary education for the early education and out-of-school workforce and provide professional development related to core competencies, the Quality Rating and Improvement System, and child care regulations that meet the needs of EEC’s mixed delivery system of child care centers (including

universal pre-kindergarten programs, out-of-school time programs, family child care homes, public preschool programs, private schools, kindergarten programs, and Head Start programs).

- Provide a site and basic operational support for a District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) that will provide targeted assistance and focused professional development to districts and schools that are identified pursuant to regulations of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; the DSAC will fulfill federal and state accountability and assistance responsibilities of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The DSAC will collaborate with Readiness Center partners and other organizations to design, deliver, and evaluate components of the targeted assistance and focused professional development program.
- With guidance and support from higher education, create professional development and learning opportunities for higher education faculty and staff members, support research activities for higher education faculty members about effective instructional practices and models, and establish partnerships with regional collaboratives (including STEM networks and Workforce Investment Boards), business and community partners, and national professional organizations.
- Disseminate information about best practices and replicable instructional models with early education and out-of-school time educators, school and district educators, and other local, regional, and state stakeholders.
- Develop robust professional development and networking opportunities by convening educators and stakeholders to explore issues related to improving the quality of teaching, including:
 - Using student data to improve the development of instruction, curricula, assessments, and professional development across the education continuum from birth through higher education;
 - Providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of a diverse student population;
 - Increasing curricular alignment across the education continuum; and
 - Creating more opportunities for reflective practice.
- Evaluate the impact of professional development programs and also district and school improvement services.
- Provide regular reports to the Board of Early Education and Care, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Board of Higher Education, and the EOE about Readiness Center services and activities and their impact on identified outcomes.

In addition to executing these primary functions, each Readiness Center could serve as a statewide center for an identified area of specialization. For example, a Readiness Center could provide services and activities related to a specific area of work and disseminate information

about best practices and replicable instructional models to stakeholders across the Commonwealth.

Leadership and Governance

During the development phase of this initiative, the EOE will oversee the establishment of the Readiness Centers and will partner with EEC, DESE, the Department of Higher Education (DHE), and other entities as appropriate to support and guide the work.

Each Readiness Center will be managed by a consortium of regional partners. A public institution of higher education (IHE) must serve as the lead partner or one of the lead partners; this institution will work in collaboration with public or private IHEs (including community colleges), educational collaboratives, educational service providers, and other entities in the region such as business and community partners to develop, coordinate, and deliver services to educators and other stakeholders. In addition, another partner within the consortium must serve as the fiscal agent; this partner will manage all fiscal and budgetary concerns for the Readiness Center.

Each Readiness Center will be governed by a Board of Directors (with members appointed by the consortium of regional partners) that will develop the strategic plan for the work, oversee the budget, secure funding and other resources, and implement strategies to maintain the short- and long-term sustainability of the Center. The Board will have the authority to hire an executive director and other staff members to operate the Readiness Center and sites within the region. The Board must be comprised of representatives (number to be determined by the consortium of partners) from the lead partner(s), the fiscal agent, early education, elementary and secondary education, higher education, educational collaboratives, and other local and regional partners.

The DSAC within each Readiness Center will be led by a Regional Assistance Director who will be hired, trained, and supervised by DESE. Targeted assistance and focused professional development will be provided by DESE staff members, contracted service providers who are identified, trained, and evaluated by DESE, the Regional Assistance Director, and the consortium of Readiness Center partners as appropriate.

The Associate Commissioner for Workforce Development at EEC, staff members at existing EEC regional offices, and other staff members will collaborate with Readiness Center staff members to identify and coordinate existing resources and provide targeted assistance and professional development to educators in early education and out-of-school time programs.

The Deputy Commissioner for P-16 Policy and Collaborative Initiatives at DHE and other staff members will disseminate information about different resources that are available to advance teaching and learning at institutions of higher education, and will also provide Readiness Center staff members with reports and analyses of different types of school-to-college data.

Core Capacities of the Regional Partners

The regional partners will 1) improve the quality of teaching across the education continuum so that all educators will be able to meet the needs of our diverse population of students, 2) improve the quality of professional development and learning opportunities for educators, 3) maximize existing resources and deliver instructional and professional development services more effectively and efficiently, and 4) drive policy improvements based on the innovative instructional practices that are developed.

As such, the consortium of regional partners must have the following core capacities:

- Demonstrated experience in providing professional development and other instructional services (including induction, preparation, and mentoring services) to educators across the education continuum;
- Demonstrated experience of active and ongoing engagement with early education and care and out-of-school time providers, K-12 schools and districts, educational collaboratives, and other educational service providers in the region;
- Demonstrated experience of active and ongoing engagement with business and community partners;
- Willingness to engage with educators across the continuum to identify and respond to instructional needs in the region;
- Demonstrated capacity to assess the impact of all Readiness Center services and activities on student, teacher, and other outcomes;
- Demonstrated capacity to research best practices in improving the quality of instruction and also district and school improvement.

The consortium of regional partners must demonstrate that there are sufficient facilities to support the provision of all Readiness Center services, including office space for Readiness Center staff members across the region, access to technology to support Readiness Center staff members and facilitate the provision of services, appropriate meeting spaces, and accessible parking as needed.

In addition to designating a site for the DSAC, the consortium of regional partners must provide office space for the Regional Assistance Director and other staff members and demonstrate that there are sufficient facilities to support the provision of targeted assistance and focused professional development to districts and schools. Each DSAC must be operational by October 31, 2009.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RFR PROCESS

Purpose

The purpose of the RFR is to invite institutions of higher education, educational collaboratives, educational service providers, business and community partners, and other stakeholders to submit proposals to establish the regional Readiness Centers.

Regional partners that establish Readiness Centers will have the opportunity to improve the quality of teaching by enhancing the delivery system for professional development, instructional, and other services for educators. In addition, these partners will 1) build stronger relationships with early education and out-of-school time providers, schools, districts, and other stakeholders, 2) increase alignment and coherence among local and regional partners, and 3) maximize existing resources.

The RFR process does not include the allocation of funds to establish a regional Readiness Center or sites within a region. Therefore, applicants are required to identify existing and potential resources that could be utilized to provide Readiness Center services and activities. However, funding to support the implementation of Readiness Center proposals may become available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and from other sources. If additional funding becomes available, the EOE will establish mechanisms to allocate funding to regional partners.

Eligibility

The following criteria must be met to submit a proposal to establish a regional Readiness Center:

- A consortium of regional partners (representing multiple sectors and stakeholders) must submit one proposal for the region, with the understanding that these partners can establish multiple sites within the region;
- The lead partner or co-lead partner within the consortium of regional partners must be a public institution of higher education; and
- One of the partners must serve as the fiscal agent and manage all fiscal and budgetary concerns for the Readiness Center.

Criteria for Review of Proposals

Successful proposals will include the following types of information:

- 1) The clear articulation of the goals of the Readiness Center, a description of the content and scope of proposed services and activities, and a description of how these services and activities will address local and regional needs as well as statewide priorities;

- 2) A detailed description of how the consortium of regional partners will work collaboratively to develop a more coherent and aligned system for delivering high-quality services to educators in the region;
- 3) A detailed description of how the consortium of regional partners currently has the core capacities necessary to operate a Readiness Center;
- 4) A detailed description of the governance structure that will be established by the consortium of regional partners to effectively oversee and manage the provision of all Readiness Center services and activities;
- 5) A detailed description of how the consortium of regional partners will leverage existing relationships and resources to manage and operate the Readiness Center;
- 6) A detailed description of how the consortium of regional partners will engage other stakeholders in the establishment of the Readiness Center;
- 7) A detailed description of how the consortium of regional partners will disseminate information about best practices and instructional models to educators and other stakeholders across the Commonwealth; and
- 8) A detailed description of how the consortium of regional partners will sustain the Readiness Center in both the short- and long-term.

Time Frame for Review and Approval of Proposals

RFR Deadlines	
RFR Release Date	July 31, 2009
Deadline for Submission of Proposals	September 23, 2009
Announcement of Approved Proposals	September 30, 2009

Proposals must be sent via e-mail to Saeyun Lee in the EOE at saeyun.lee@state.ma.us by 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 23, 2009. Proposals will be reviewed by a committee comprised of representatives from EEC, DESE, DHE, and EOE in accordance with the aforementioned criteria. As necessary, the review committee will request additional information or refinement of submitted proposals.

Development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The consortium of partners for each approved Readiness Center will develop a MOU with the EOE. Issues related to the governance, management, and funding of the Readiness Center will be addressed in the MOU, including among others: 1) the responsibilities of the lead partner or lead partners; 2) the responsibilities of the fiscal agent; 3) establishing the Board of Directors and the governance structure among the partners; 4) appointing Board members; 5) inviting additional partners to join the consortium; 6) establishing new sites within a region, and

7) restricting the percentage of grant or other types of funding that may be retained for administrative/overhead costs (for example, the portion of funding that may be retained could be restricted to no more than 10 percent).

COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

- **Letter of Intent**: One letter of intent per region, signed by representatives from each proposed partner within the regional consortium, must be sent via e-mail to Saeyun Lee at saeyun.lee@state.ma.us by Friday, August 21, 2009.
- **Project Abstract** (2 – 3 pages)
- **Narrative** (15 – 20 pages)
 - Identification of the priority issues and concerns that will be addressed by the Readiness Center
 - Description of the content and scope of proposed Readiness Center services and activities and specifically how these services and activities will address local and regional needs as well as statewide priorities
 - Description of measurable successes and achievements of the consortium of partners with regard to the provision of proposed services and activities
 - Description of an area of specialization (as applicable), the services and activities that would be provided, and the strategies that would be used to disseminate information about best practices and replicable instructional models to stakeholders
 - Identification of the Readiness Center site(s) within the region, description of the services and activities that would be provided, and available facilities and resources
 - Description of the roles and responsibilities of each partner within the regional consortium, including information about the capacity of each partner to fulfill proposed responsibilities
 - Description of existing partnerships among regional partners, including information about joint programs that have been implemented and evidence demonstrating the success of these initiatives
 - Description of how new relationships will be developed among regional partners, including information about efforts to engage different partners in the establishment of the Readiness Center
- **Implementation Plan** (2 – 3 pages)
 - Description of the proposed implementation plan for providing Readiness Center services and activities

- **Governance Structure**

- Description of the governance structure that will be established by the consortium of partners (at multiple sites if applicable) to support the provision of all Readiness Center services and activities
- Identification of the proposed members of the Board of Directors

- **Evaluation Plan**

- Description of the proposed plan for assessing the impact of Readiness Center services and activities on student, teacher, and other outcomes, including preliminary information about the indicators and benchmarks that will be utilized

- **Proposed Budget**

- Description of the institutional and organizational resources that could be committed by the consortium of partners to manage and operate the Readiness Center
- Description of the estimated costs related to the management and operation of the Readiness Centers

- **Letters of Support (as desired)**

PRIMARY CONTACT

All inquiries about the Readiness Centers initiative and the RFR process should be directed to Saeyun Lee in the EOE (saeyun.lee@state.ma.us or 617.979.8351).